

HOLOCAUST : A TELEVISION DRAMA  
(INSERTS IN TAPE LIBRARY)

ANNCR: FOR FOUR EVENINGS OF PRIME TIME TELEVISION (ED. NOTE: HOLOCAUST BEGAN ON SUNDAY, APRIL 16) AMERICAN VIEWERS HAVE BEEN CONFRONTED WITH A DRAMATIZATION OF ONE OF THE MODERN WORLD'S MOST SHOCKING OCCURRENCES: HITLER'S NEAR-EXTERMINATION OF EUROPEAN JEWS. THE NINE-AND-A-HALF HOUR SERIES WAS THE LATEST EFFORT BY AN AMERICAN NETWORK, IN THIS CASE THE NATIONAL BROADCASTING COMPANY (NBC), TO DEAL AT LENGTH WITH A SUBJECT OF HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE. JUST BEFORE THE FIRST THREE-HOUR EPISODE WAS AIRED, VOA'S RAY KABAKER TALKED WITH HOLOCAUST DIRECTOR MARVIN CHOMSKY. NOW, HERE'S -----WITH A REPORT ON THAT CONVERSATION.

VOICE: HOLOCAUST IS SOMETHING THAT HAS NEVER BEFORE BEEN ATTEMPTED ON AMERICAN TELEVISION: A FICTIONALIZED DRAMA SHOWING HOW THE NAZI POLICY OF EXTERMINATING THE JEWS AFFECTED BOTH THE VICTIMS AND THOSE WHO PERSECUTED THEM. INSTEAD OF PORTRAYING THE NAZIS AS MONSTERS, HOLOCAUST, EVEN MORE CHILLINGLY, DEPICTS THEM AS ORDINARY CITIZENS WHO THROUGH MORAL COWARDICE WERE ABLE TO COMMIT ACTS THEY WOULD UNDER ORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES HAVE CONSIDERED INHUMAN. THE QUESTION THAT INEVITABLY OCCURS TO THE AUDIENCE IS, "WOULD I, IN THE SAME CIRCUMSTANCES, HAVE TRIED TO SAVE MY OWN SKIN BY GOING ALONG WITH THE OFFICIAL POLICY OF DESTROYING ALL JEWS? OR WOULD I HAVE HAD THE COURAGE TO ENDANGER MY

VOICE: OWN LIFE BY SPEAKING OUT?" THE STORY FOCUSES ON THE WEISS FAMILY -- LOYAL GERMANS WHO ARE VICTIMIZED BECAUSE THEY ARE JEWS. THEIR 43-:589,, DUPLICATED IN MANY JEWISH HOUSEHOLDS, ALSO RAISE SOME TOUGH QUESTIONS. WHY ARE THEY SO BLIND TO THE MENACE SURROUNDING THEM UNTIL IT IS TOO LATE TO SAVE THEMSELVES? WHY DOES DOCTOR WEISS COLLABORATE WITH THE NAZI GOVERNMENT TO THE EXTENT OF BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE JEWISH COUNCIL THAT DISTRIBUTES FOOD, AND PROVIDES EDUCATION AND MEDICAL CARE, TO JEWS IN THE WARSAW GHETTO? WOULD WE, IN SIMILAR CIRCUMSTANCES, BE SO CONVINCED OF THE ESSENTIAL GOODNESS OF HUMAN NATURE THAT WE WOULD ALSO BE BLIND TO THE THREAT OF ANNIHILATION? HOLOCAUST DIRECTOR MARVIN CHOMSKY PROVIDES NO ANSWERS. HE SAYS HIS AIM WAS TO SHOW THE AUDIENCE THAT THE HOLOCAUST WAS NOT JUST A REMOTE HISTORICAL EVENT, BUT SOMETHING THAT MIGHT CONCEIVABLY HAPPEN AGAIN:

TAPE: CUT ONE -- CHOMSKY

"WE ARE DEALING WITH WHAT IS OSTENSIBLY A FICTION OF PEOPLE WHO ARE CAUGHT UP IN AN EVENT AND AN ACTION WHICH THEY CANNOT CONTROL. THEY ARE SWEEPED TO THEIR FATES BY FORCES BEYOND THEIR OWN COMPREHENSION. IT'S A STORY OF SURVIVORS AND VICTIMS. AND BY PRESENTING PEOPLE WHO DO SHARE (A) COMMON BOND AND LINEAGE WITH ALL OTHER VICTIMS, SURVIVORS AND THE LIKE, WE HOPE TO FIND THE EMPATHY, RATHER THAN SYMPATHY, WITH THESE EVENTS, AND THE AWARENESS THAT THESE EVENTS CAN HAPPEN AGAIN, AND THAT THEY ARE INDEED HAPPENING NOW, IN MANY PARTS OF THE WORLD."

VOICE: IN ORDER TO SHOW HOW THE HOLOCAUST TOOK PLACE, MARVIN CHOMSKY AND TELEVISION WRITER GERALD GREEN DECIDED TO PORTRAY TWO FICTIONAL FAMILIES: THAT OF DOCTOR JOSEPH

VOICE: WEISS, A POLISH JEW WHO HAS SET UP A PRACTICE AND RAISED  
(CONT) HIS FAMILY IN BERLIN, AND THAT OF ERIC DORF, A YOUNG  
UNEMPLOYED LAWYER WHO DECIDES THAT HIS FUTURE LIES WITH  
THE ARMY. THE WEISS FAMILY LOSES EVERYTHING, WHILE ERIC  
DORF RISES HIGHER AND HIGHER IN THE RANKS OF THE NAZI  
PARTY. AS THE STORY UNFOLDS, ALL THE HORRORS OF THE  
HOLOCAUST ARE DEPICTED: SUDDEN ARRESTS AND DEPORTATIONS  
TO GHETTOS AND CONCENTRATION CAMPS; THE BURNING ALIVE OF  
INNOCENT PEASANTS DRIVEN AT GUNPOINT INTO A SYNAGOGUE;  
THE SHOOTING AND MASS BURIAL OF THOUSANDS OF DEFENSELESS,  
NAKED CIVILIANS; THE HANGING OF SUPPOSED SPIES AND TRAITORS  
WHOSE ACTUAL CRIME IS TO BE JEWISH; THE RAPE OF JEWISH  
WOMEN, AND THE COLD-BLOODED MURDER OF JEWISH CHILDREN.  
MOST TERRIFYING, PERHAPS, IS THE NAZI OFFICERS'  
PREOCCUPATION WITH DOCUMENTING ALL THESE KILLINGS. THEY  
KEEP CAREFUL COUNT OF THEIR VICTIMS, ALONG WITH SLIDES  
AND FILMS OF THEIR MANNER OF DYING. TO PEOPLE WHO SAY  
THAT REMINDING THE PUBLIC OF THESE ATROCITIES IS POINT-  
LESS, SINCE THE NAZI PARTY IS NO LONGER IN POWER IN  
GERMANY, MARVIN CHOMSKY HAS THIS REPLY.

TAPE : CUT TWO -- CHOMSKY

"THE NAZIS ARE WITH US JUST AS MEMBERS OF THE KU KLUX  
KLAN (A RACIST ORGANIZATION) ARE WITH US. WE ARE BESET  
WITH RACISTS, WITH BIGOTS, WITH EVERY SPECTRUM OF HUMANITY  
AND INHUMANITY THAT ONE COULD POSSIBLY CONCEIVE OF, AND  
I THINK WE CANNOT TELL THE STORY OF THE NAZI ERA TOO  
MANY TIMES. I THINK IT'S A STORY THAT MUST BE TOLD."

VOICE : ONE REASON MISTER CHOMSKY THINKS THE STORY OF THE  
HOLOCAUST MUST BE TOLD IS THAT MANY YOUNG PEOPLE, BOTH  
IN EUROPE AND IN THE UNITED STATES, AS WELL AS OTHER

VOICE: COUNTRIES, ARE NOT EVEN AWARE THAT IT TOOK PLACE.  
(CONT) TECHNICIANS WHO HELPED TO FILM THE STORY IN GERMANY  
AND IN AUSTRIA WERE OFTEN AGHAST TO FIND OUT WHAT HAD  
HAPPENED BEFORE THEY WERE BORN.

TAPE: CUT THREE -- CHOMSKY

"WE WERE SHOOTING THE SEQUENCE AT BABI YAR (A CONCENTRATION CAMP IN RUSSIA) AND SEVERAL OF THE TECHNICIANS CAME TO ME AND SAID, 'MARVIN, YOU MADE THIS UP (THE SHOOTING OF NAKED CIVILIANS) FOR THE FILM, DIDN'T YOU?' AND I SAID, 'NO, I DID NOT.' AND THEY SAID, 'BUT PEOPLE COULD NOT DO THIS TO ANOTHER PEOPLE.' AND I TURNED TO ONE OF OUR WEAPONS EXPERTS WHO WAS WITH US TO HANDLE THE WEAPONS -- WE NEEDED VARIOUS ARMAMENTS IN THE DEPICTION OF THE SHOW, -- AND I SAID TO HIM, 'HAVE YOU HEARD OF BABI YAR?' HE SILENTLY NODDED HIS HEAD, YES. BUT THEY SAID, 'IS IT TRUE?' AND AGAIN HE SHOOK HIS HEAD, YES, IT HAPPENED. IT WAS A REVELATION TO THEM."

VOICE: HOLOCAUST HAS PROVOKED SOME PROTESTS IN THE UNITED STATES, AS WELL AS A GREAT DEAL OF PRAISE FROM RELIGIOUS AND EDUCATIONAL GROUPS. SOME OF THE PROTESTORS HAVE ARGUED THAT THE TELEVISION SERIES IS NOTHING BUT ZIONIST PROPAGANDA; BUT CHOMSKY REPLIES THAT THE PROGRAM SHOWS THE SUFFERINGS OF MANY DIFFERENT GROUPS OF PEOPLE, WITH A WIDE VARIETY OF POLITICAL PERSUASIONS.

TAPE: CUT FOUR -- CHOMSKY

"WE HAVE ZIONISTS, WE HAVE ANTI-ZIONISTS; WE HAVE RELIGIOUS JEWS, WE HAVE IRRELIGIOUS JEWS; WE HAVE GOOD GERMANS, WE HAVE BAD GERMANS, IF YOU WOULD CALL (THEM) THAT; WE HAVE NAZIS, WE SHOW CATHOLIC PRIESTS WHO ARE TAKEN FROM THEIR PULPIT AND SENT TO DACHAU, AS WAS FATHER BERNARD LIFTENBERG AS WELL AS ABOUT 2600 OTHER CATHOLIC PRIESTS WHO DIED AT DACHAU. THIS IS NOT A JEWISH STORY. THIS IS THE STORY OF THE LOGICAL OUTCOME OF THE POLICE STATE :THE ABROGATION OF CIVIL LIBERTIES AND THE STRIPPING OF CIVIL RIGHTS. THE LOGICAL COURSE IS THE GAS CHAMBER, IS THE FIRING SQUAD, OR THE HANGING TREE."

VOICE: SINCE MOST AMERICAN TELEVISION IS PAID FOR BY ADVERTISING, ONLY THOSE THOSE PROGRAMS WHICH ADVERTISERS BELIEVE WILL

VOICE:  
(CONT)

ATTRACT A LARGE AUDIENCE ARE BROADCAST OVER PRIVATELY-OWNED OR COMMERCIAL NETWORKS. TELEVISION CRITICS PREDICT THAT IF HOLOCAUST ATTRACTS A LARGE AUDIENCE, FURTHER IN-DEPTH TREATMENTS OF SERIOUS SUBJECTS MAY BE FORTHCOMING ON AMERICAN TELEVISION. SO FAR, AUDIENCES HAVE BEEN LARGE, THOUGH NOT QUITE AS LARGE AS THE FIFTY-TWO PERCENT OF THE NEW YORK CITY AUDIENCE THAT WATCHED THE FIRST EPISODE OF ROOTS, A HISTORICAL DRAMA SET IN THE ERA WHEN SLAVERY WAS LEGAL IN THE UNITED STATES. THE SIZE OF THE AUDIENCE FOR HOLOCAUST, HOWEVER, IS NOT THE ONLY QUESTION THAT INTERESTS RESEARCHERS. THEY ALSO WANT TO KNOW WHAT GROUPS OF CITIZENS HAVE BEEN WATCHING AND HOW THEY HAVE BEEN REACTING TO THE SERIES. THE ANSWERS MAY HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN TELEVISION.

##

##

##

BML/PY